

Nomination 2 Fly in the Eye Award 2024

‘What we were able to do thanks to you’ | World Vision

Centralizing donors, employees, or ambassadors is rarely a good idea, and the (exuberant and grotesque) act of thanking privileged people often sparks objections. Such is the case with World Vision, which published a series of ‘updates’ from various project areas over the past year ([Sarwah](#), Sierra Leone; [Kyabigambire](#), Uganda; [Idumbala](#), Tanzania; [Dembia](#), Ethiopia). The fact that the donor (or sponsor) does not appear on screen in these updates does not diminish their centrality. On the contrary, in this case it only makes it worse.

In the videos, local people express their gratitude extensively, resulting in a broad gallery of people in vulnerable situations affirming the alleged key role of their ‘benefactors.’ Precisely because of the scripting and repetition, the often humble gratitude expressed is deeply uncomfortable and painful. It places people in a subordinate position, especially since they do not seem to be able to choose their own words or assert any form of self-determined agency.

While the video emphasizes that the residents ‘proudly explain’ what has been achieved, the structure is exactly the same for each individual: greet the sponsors, introduce themselves, highlight World Vision’s intervention, thank the sponsors, and move on. More than any other campaign, this video series demonstrates how thanking donors pushes people into a position of humility.

Other videos also fall into the trap of centralizing the donor. For example, Red een kind (Save a Child) comes close to World Vision’s approach with their ‘[Personal Message from Gwasssi, Kenya](#).’ While the scripting seems slightly looser, the stereotypical imagery is unmistakable. Their ambassador, Reyer van Drongelen, offers a better perspective, explicitly stating that it shouldn’t be about charity (and, we would add, not about gratitude either!) but about addressing fundamental injustice. It’s a commendable quote, though even in [this video](#) Van Drongelen is maneuvered into the role of a white savior.

The same pattern is evident with UNICEF, which [last year](#) turned their aid workers into heroes and now does the same with [donors](#): ‘Among the bad news, there’s also good news: you.’ Similar heroics are attributed to aid workers, fundraisers, donors, and charity runners in [this video by ZOA](#), while Artsen zonder Grenzen (Doctors Without Borders) unnecessarily elevates [campaigners](#) and [donors](#) in a video that feels uncomfortable due to its excessive mix of contrasting heroism, vulnerability, and gratitude. This abundance of special mentions is accompanied by yet another urgent appeal to organizations: be cautious in showcasing and representing gratitude.